

A
L E T T E R
T O

Dr. S M E L L E.

S H E W I N G

The IMPROPRIETY of his New-invented
W O O D E N F O R C E P S ;

A S A L S O ,

The ABSURDITY of his METHOD
Of *Teaching* and *Practising*
M I D W I F R Y .

By WILLIAM DOUGLAS, M. D.
*Physician to his Royal Highness the Prince of Wales's
Household, and Man-midwife.*

Decipimur Specie recti. ————— H O R A .

L O N D O N :

Printed for J. ROBERTS in *Warwick Lane.* 1748.

(Price Sixpence.)

THE LITTLE

1609/2247

WOODEN TOWER

The Academy of Music

Of Teaching and Practice

M. D. W. I. F. R. V.

By William I. F. R. V.

Physician to the Royal Hospital, and
Fellow of the Royal Society

London: Printed by J. B. R. V.

LONDON

Printed for J. B. R. V. in the Strand

(Price 2s. 6d.)



L E T T E R
T O

Dr. S M E L L E.

S I R,



Herein shall trouble you with a few Remarks on a new invented Instrument of yours, which you call *Wooden Forceps*: The Contrivance is so extraordinary, that I think a Man of Skill will scarce know how to use 'em; their Service so unnecessary, that where ever they could be apply'd, Nature would do as well without 'em: I will, and dare venture to assert, that it would puzzle any Man living, except yourself, to shew any real Occasion, where they could be used.

Mysteries of this sort should be clear'd up, and it would be a Pity that Mankind should lose the Benefit of the mechanical Labours of a Man of your Genius; for so amazing is

B

your

your Skill in that Branch of Philosophy, that every one must stand in need of your Explanation, whenever the World is oblig'd with any of your Productions!

I am sorry to have Occasion to censure a Brother in this particular Manner; but had not your own Self-sufficiency carried you beyond attending to friendly Counsel, this Affair might have been amicably settled, by the repeated Conversations we have had together; therefore I hope you'll consider the Remarks I am going to make as intended to promote the Good of Mankind, and to vindicate the Honour of the Profession.

The great Fatality that has of late happened in Midwifry, has caused Numbers to call in Question that superior Skill that is claim'd by Men-midwives. And 'tis now high time that some of us should examine into the Reason of these *Out-cries*, that the World may be undeceiv'd, and that the deserved Reputation *Man-midwifry* has acquir'd



quir'd may be supported; as some of these Complaints have arose where you have been *Operator*, I am apt to suspect your new Invention and Method, which I shall speak to in their Place.

It has been always esteem'd wise and prudent, in Parents, to consider the Disposition and Inclination of their Children, in order to place them to what they seem most naturally adapted: Surely then, every Man that has his Employment to choose, when he comes to Age of Maturity, will avoid such, for the Exercise of which Nature has form'd him unfit.

But without any Regard to these prudential Rules, with an unfit Hand for *Midwifery*, you endeavour to rival your great Head in Mechanics; which, in it's way, most excels I know not; but this I can say for your Hand, that it has the Advantage of making Matters exceeding

easy for the Husband, wherever it is
employ'd.

The *Physicians* are no great Friends
to *Men-midwives*, because they do not
confine themselves to the Business they
profess; and there has lately been an *Instance*
where a Surgeon in the City, upon propa-
gating a Midwifry Acquaintance, was obli-
ged, by his Brother Surgeons, to declare
himself, either *Man-midwife* or *Surgeon*, if
he desired to be well with them: His Inte-
rest led him to choose the last; and he
was afterwards *chose Surgeon* to an Hospital,

Your Complaisance to oblige those two
Bodies of *Gentlemen*, has carried itself so
far, as to introduce five times the Number,
more than ever will, in all Probability, get
any Employ, (how they are qualify'd will
appear by what is possible, to be extracted
from their Master.) It has been thought ad-
vantagous, in some Hospitals, to choose
one of their Surgeons *principal Operator*,
judging

judging that the more frequently a Man operated, the better Operator he would be; so different are you to this way of reasoning, that, I think, were the Pupils you have introduced to have equal Turn about, there would not be real *Midwifry Cafes* enough in the whole Kingdom to make one good Operator amongst 'em.

Midwifry depends upon Practice, nor can it be perform'd without it; any more than the expert Hands of an experienced Artist could be parallel'd by the profound Reasoning of a Man of Sense, not brought up to that Business. I am talking of *Man-midwifry*, and not of *Cafes* where you, or any body else, must be oblig'd to take the Child, perhaps, before a Man can pull his *Gloves off*.

If there had not been, before your Time, more *Men-midwives* than could have served the Public, or than knew how to live, introducing a fit Number would have been of
public

public Good, if properly instructed; but I must own, I should not recommend you for their Master, and that for Reasons that will appear hereafter.

If the Gentlemen of the Faculty should find for the future, that *Men-midwives* interfere more in their Profession, I hope they will excuse those that would have stuck to *Midwifery* only, and impute it to the Necessity they are under of getting their Bread in the best Manner they can; for, as there now are more *Men-midwives* than Streets, it will lay every one under a Necessity of practising *Physick* or *Surgery* likewise, which Innovation the Faculty will be more particularly obliged to you for.

The *Ancients*, to whom we owe almost our All, for Reasons best known to themselves, quite neglected giving any Assistance to the *suffering Fair*, but in Cases of the *dead Child*, *Mole* or *false Conception*: For the first they foolishly (pardon

don the Expression) invented a Parcel of lumbering Instruments, as the *Speculum Matricis*, *Crotchets*, *Feartets*, and *Hooks* innumerable; by which, and an ill-concerted *Parage* of stimulating and forcing Medicines, they were so often disappointed; that they may be said to have given up that Branch of Surgery entirely, and left the poor unhappy Fair Sex to God and themselves, whenever a preternatural Labour happen'd.

Their Successors, more crafty, have kept up the Face, by juggling about with them a Bag of Lumber, a more proper Badge of the Farrier than the *Accoucheur*. As to the second, I will not say that such a Thing never occurs; but I believe it is now, as it was then, oftener talk'd of for a Cloak to Ignorance, at least a plausible Excuse for the Negligence of the Male or Female Operator, than ever such a Thing really happens.

Dr.

Dr. *Hugh Chamberlen* was the first that introduc'd the *Forceps* amongst us, after having been baffled at *Paris*, by them and his translating *Mauriceau*, obtain'd a Character; I am doubtful whether he was more oblig'd to his *Translation* or to his *Forceps*; I alledge the first: But, I am of Opinion, the World is not oblig'd to him for either; how much it is oblig'd to you, will in some Measure, appear by what follows.

Dr. *Walker* pretended to improve Dr. *Chamberlen's Forceps*, but, in Truth, spoil'd them, by making them *Male* and *Female*: With this botch'd Instrument you set out; a strange Demonstration of the mechanical Turn of your Head; you set out, I say, with the *Male* and *Female Forceps*, and used them long, even until People began to take Notice of your bad Success; (*but a fertile Head is never at a Loss*) therefore the *Wooden Forceps* was produc'd! But whether ~~your~~ Cunning or ~~your~~ Conscience prevail'd

vail'd most in this *Contrivance* will appear clearer by and by.

The properest Thing to make *Forceps* of, is Steel, temper'd so well as not to bend in operating, which is a capital Fault in the *French Ones*; the finer they are made, the better.

Forceps, made of *Wood*, can never answer the Intention, because the essential Properties of *Forceps* are *Strength* and *Smallness*; and it would be equally just to assert, that a weak large Hand is preferable to a small One of greater Strength for Operations in Midwifry.

The Use of the *Forceps* is, you know, to extract a Child when the Head is properly sunk into the *Vagina*, for they will not do in all *Head-Births*; many of which, nevertheless, ought to be brought *Head foremost*. Now suppose you should apply these *Wooden Forceps* to a Child that may be extracted by a Pair of *Steel Ones*; *Wooden Ones* will break, whereas *Steel Ones* would have ex-

tracted the Child through their superiour Strength; the Consequence of the failing of these *Wooden Affairs* is, that the Child must either be turned, or the *Brain extracted*, or else the *Crotchet* used; the first to the great Danger of the *Mother*, and the two last to the Destruction of the *Child*; which, I fear, you have lately, but too often, experienced from the *Success*, I perpetually hear, you have had.

I have been told of no less than *Eight Women* who have died within these few Months under the Hands of a *Wooden Operator*, which I believe is greater Execution, than all the *Men-midwives put together* in the Bills of Mortality can pretend to, besides your self.

These are Things that ought to be spoke to by Somebody; for the common People have that *implicit Faith in Men-midwives*, that they scarce ever accuse them of any Fault in their Parts, but impute any Misfortune that befalls *poor Women* to the Badness of the Case; and a Man may go on a long While with

with the Vulgar, and do a great deal of *Mischief*, 'till he falls in with People of Distinction; but, I think, it would be a great Pity, that a Person or two of Quality should fall a Sacrifice to *stupid Contrivances*, before the World can be apprised, that such *Wooden Forceps* are not proper Instruments of *Midwifery*; this Fatality has happen'd (your Pupils had no Share here) among People in Trade, therefore make no Noise, for had they been of any Distinction, you would have scarcely gone on so far.

So fond is the World of every Thing that has the Appearance of Novelty, that, to your great Reputation, has it been said, and receiv'd, that *Doctor Smelle* had invented a new Instrument, that none knew how to use without his Instruction; which first put me upon seeking after these *Wooden Forceps*: This indeed arose from some of the mistaken young Gentlemen under your Direction; and may serve your Purpose, however detrimental it may prove to the true Practice of

Midwifry. Now it behoves every Body of Men to support the Reputation of their Profession, and in most Arts there is a *Test* required of a Man's Qualifications.

The Physicians admit none of their Body without knowing *their Merit*; and no Man is a *Surgeon by Law*, 'till he has pass'd a public Examination; but I know of no particular Scrutiny for *Men-midwives*, therefore I think it absolutely necessary for the Professors of it to have a watchful Eye, that nothing extraneous shall be introduced, that may sully the Reputation of their Profession; or ruin the Credit of true *Midwifry*; which I apprehend must be the Consequence, if such Things as these pass without Correction.

Steel Forceps have been used heretofore by very good Professors, but as Practice and Industry has discover'd safer, and easier Methods, every Man, that knows 'em, is right to use what serves his Purpose best: Now as the *Forceps* are the only Thing you can use

use in *Head-Births*, except when there is Occasion to extract the Brain, which in some Cases may be requisite; I hope, for the Sake of the poor Women that may fall under your Hands, that you'll betake yourself to *Steel Ones* again, and give up this *Wooden Project*, which may cause the whole Profession to be censur'd instead of the *Inventor*: But, for my Part, I have entirely excluded all *Forceps* out of my Practice, and so have some others of my Acquaintance; and I find, that what I use never fails, when the *Forceps* would be ineffectual. This, Sir, I don't pretend to call a *Novum*, because there are some few that I know, use the same Method; and I am ready, for the public Good, to teach any one that will put himself a proper Time under my Directions.

There are several better Ways to extract *Head-Births* than the *Forceps*, which you appear to be quite a Stranger to; I know there are some Gentlemen of the Profession,
 who

who dectry Instruments entirely, but that must arise from the Want of a proper Knowledge of the Use of them.

Since I am upon this Subject, I shall take the Liberty of making a few Remarks on your *Method* of teaching. When you first came to Town, being affected with the Sufferings of poor Women, as a *Teacher* of *Midwifry*, you declar'd to endeavour to give them Relief, which in itself was very laudable, had you but preserved your *great Virtue*; but instead of that you fell into a *pitiful Meanness*, I will not say without Regard, either to *Reputation*, or *Honour*; by which, in a great Measure, Gentlemen who did, and others who intended to teach properly (by instructing such Persons only who were fit for the Business, and would not have suffer'd any to have been turn'd out unqualified) were *prevented*.

You, without any Regard to the Consequence, in your Bills set forth, that you gave

an

an *universal* Lecture in *Midwifry* for *Half a Guinea*, or divided it into Four for a *Guinea*. Now, Sir, suppose any one that had had your *universal* Lecture, and after that consequently your *Certificate*; from which, as a Voucher in his Pocket, the World might believe him qualified, and his *Credulity in your Instructions* persuade him, that he is equal to the Business, or, at least, to say within himself, that no Man knows what he can do 'till he tries, and upon this should attempt to deliver a *difficult Birth*, in which Case, I think, the Death of both the Mother and Child must necessarily ensue; perhaps he might have Address enough to persuade the Husband, that what had happen'd could not, from the Nature of the Case, be avoided.

But to whom could a Man of the Profession impute this Wickedness? to a mean-spirited Master, greedy of *Half a Guinea* or a *Guinea*, or to a poor *mistaken Pupil*? All the World will agree, to him that *caused*, and not him that *effected* this Misfortune.

There

There are Numbers, as above mention'd, that have your *Certificates* in their Pockets, and are no more capable of performing a *difficult Labour*, than I am able to carry *St. Paul's Church on my Back*. Other Masters of *Midwifery* declare twenty Guineas to be their Price, which had you kept up to, you would have done the World more *Justice*, yourself more *Service*, and the Profession more *Honour*. I blame no young Gentleman for getting Knowledge at an easy Purchase, but 'tis a double Crime in him who first deceives them, and after that imposes them on the World as Men qualified, to the Detriment of credulous or necessitous poor Creatures, that may fall Victims to their insufficient Education; for 'tis very certain, that there are too many nominal *Man-midwives* of your introducing, which is an Injury to both the World and the Profession. I think

I think you would do well, both for the public Good and your own Credit, if, for the future, you would resolve not to instruct any one, that will not or cannot stay a proper Time; and I would advise you also, to teach such only who are by Nature form'd for the Purpose, because to instruct any that are not so, is only *wronging them and injuring the World.*

Any one pusillanimous or sickly has neither Strength nor Constitution proper; on the contrary, a *rare-bon'd*, large-banded Man is no more fit for the Business, than a Ploughman is for a *Dancing-Master*; a Man that has a large Hand, is neither fit to introduce an Instrument, nor turn a Child, the only Cases in which we are call'd: For in the first, his Hand occupies that Space that should be left for the Instrument; and, in the last, may hurt the *Matrix*, cause Inflammations, Abscesses, Mortifications, and innumerable other bad Consequences may

D

entue,

ensue, both to the Destruction of the Mother and Child,

Such *monstrous Hands* are, like *Wooden Forceps*, fit only to hold Horses by the Nose, whilst they are shod by the *Farrier*, or stretch Boots in *Cranburne Alley*.

When I first saw your Paper Lantern, wrote upon, MIDWIFRY taught here for Five Shillings, I thought, from the Size of your Hand, you would never have attempted a real preternatural Labour; for in a natural one, a Midwife is as sufficient as any body: I imagin'd that you would not offer at any thing more than shewing your Machine, and Glass Matrix (which was invented by Mr. *Aaron Lambe* the Auctioneer) thro' which the Nature of extracting or turning the Child might be shew'd; but I should not now be at all surpriz'd to hear, that you was about to rival the *Harlequin* of *Covent-Garden*, or the *Equilibrist* of the *Hay-market*, for I think your Feet as fit for them, as your Hand

is

is for *Midwifry*, and I don't doubt but that you would shine as much in Performances of that Sort as you do in those of your Profession.

A Machine is used by most Masters, to give an Idea to their Pupils, in order to prepare them for operating upon the natural Subject; the nearer to Nature their Apparatus is, the *more preferable*; every good Master should use a natural *Fœtus* in his Machine, as that is in some Measure Nature itself, and by it the Position of the Child, a very essential Part, is learnt: Instead of a Child, you make use of *little stuffed Babies*, which have rather amused, than instructed, your Pupils in the natural Members of a Child; of which I'll give you a short History.

A certain quondam Pupil of yours, and a *Doctor* too, being call'd to a Cross-Birth, enquires of the Midwife the Nature of the Case, of which when he was satisfy'd, prepares himself to deliver the Woman;

he began, *contrary to all Decency*, with laying her *quite bare*, for the Benefit of operating, then, introducing his Hand, after some time brought a Hand of the Child into the World, but not being us'd to practice upon the natural Limbs of Children, he call'd for a Candle, and saw it was a Hand, and upon that return'd it; and after some time, thro' the same Skill, brought down either the same, or the other Hand, taking the Advantage of the Candle for his Satisfaction; he a second time return'd a Hand, and, after some Difficulty, brought a Foot, of which likewise he assur'd himself by the Candle, and after that extracted the Child alive. The Mother and It both did very well, and the *Doctor*, by the By-standers, had the Character of being a very *fine and a good Man*.

This, *Sir*, must have been a most blundering Piece of Business; but had the *Doctor* been us'd to the natural *Fetus*, (instead of your *Babies*, where he had the Advantage likewise

likewise of peeping over the *Cur-pubis*, and thro' Mr. *Lambe's* Glass Matrix) there's no doubt but he would have been better acquainted with what he was about. What I am most astonish'd at is, the Audaciousness of *so young a Practitioner*, that durst introduce his Hand three times into the *Uterus*, contrary to the known *Rules of Midwifery*; and 'tis owing to a good Constitution and a happy Make, that the poor Woman escap'd with Life, and not to the *Doctor's Skill*.

I would not be understood by this, that a Man of Judgment shall always be successful; and 'tis here shewn that an ignorant Man may not always be unfortunate; but there are certainly some *Criteria's* to form one's Judgment by, otherwise, the Whole would be a Confusion, without any *Distinction of Merit, or Demerit*.

Your Pupil's Luck in the Case above mention'd no Man can praise; your own Success

cess in operating, is demonstrated, by your Method, Hand, and Forceps, which every Body must blame.

Decency is a Thing that should be very particularly preserved in this Operation; that obscene Method you have brought into Use, of exposing Women quite bare to a whole Room full of Company, is sufficient to make every Woman abhor the Name or Sight of a *Man-midwife*.

Barbarities, on the other Hand, are equally shocking, and the Epithet of Butchering, apply'd to some of us, has no Injustice in it's Similitude. A Case which I am told you lately attended deserves to be recorded, and, if so, your physical Capacity to be enquired into: *It was in the Meuse, on his M---y's Body: Coachman's Wife, where, it's said, you was backward and forward for a whole Month. The Woman was suffer'd to flood all that Time, till she was near Death, when two other Men-midwives were sent for; one only came, who,*
when

when he saw the Woman, declar'd it was too late for any thing to be done, and that it was a gone Case, and so took his Leave: It's said you continu'd till she explet, and after that cut her open, and took the Child out alive, which died likewise in about two Minutes afterwards. Had any Midwife in Town stay'd by a bleeding Woman till she was quite exhausted, before she had sent for a Man-midwife, she would have been severely reprimanded, and very deservedly have lost all her Business. To cut a Woman open who had lost all her Blood (consequently there could be no Hopes of the Child's Life) was substituting an Appearance of Barbarity for a Remedy for a former Neglect.

There is another Case which happened within these three Months, or thereabouts, where it's said you was Operator, in which the Woman and Child both died before you could get out of the Room. Here you offer'd to excuse the People your Fee, if they would let you open the Woman, which was consented to.

Every

Every Man, satisfy'd that what he has done is right, should, for the Vindication of his own Character, and likewise for the Satisfaction of the Husband, desire that an indifferent Person might be call'd in on such Occasions, by which Means every body might be satisfy'd, and the Operator clear'd of any bad Imputations; *but to open Women by ones self*, after such Misfortunes, is endeavouring to *signify* all Knowledge, I will not say to screen your Ignorance.

The Reputation of *Man-midwifery*, from some of the late Professors of it, has in some Measure pav'd the Way for the Lengths you have run, I am sorry I cannot say it was your own Success! *This modern Practice*, and the *Numbers* introduc'd by you, seems to have alarm'd the good old Women, who, when they find their own Insufficiency, generally send for better Help.

Happy wou'd it be for the *suffering Sex*, if the Candor of the late mention'd *Doctor*

Every

was

was imitated by the rest of his *Brethren*, who, thro' a *nominal Character*, altho' not capable of performing a difficult Birth, will not suffer any body that could assist to be sent for, which, in the End, will affect this useful Branch of Physick, and the Consequence must be, that the Ruin of all true Practice will ensue, and the World may betake themselves to their old Women again, and with great Justice say, that *Man-midwifry* has done more *Harm* than *Good*.

I am, Sir,

Yours, &c.

W. DOUGLAS.



was imitated by the rest of his Brethren,
 who, tho' a nominal Churchman, also, not
 capable of performing a difficult Duty, will
 not suffer any body that could assist to be sent
 for, which, in the End, will affect this un-
 sal Branch of Physick, and the Consequence
 must be, that the Ruin of all true Physicians
 will ensue, and the World may bewake them-
 selves to their old Women again, and with
 great Justice say, that Man-midwifery has
 done more Harm than Good.

I am, Sir,

Yours, &c.

W. DOUGLAS.

